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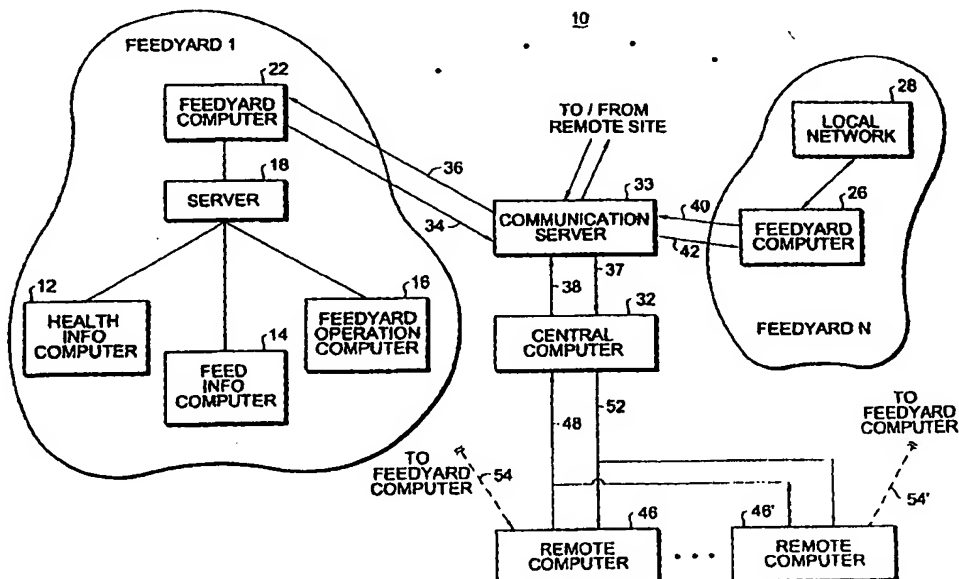
(57) Abstract

A feedyard information system (10, as seen in fig. 1), and an associated method (92, as seen in fig. 4) generate pooled data (98) taken from more than one feedyard (1 and N). Data elements of the pooled data (98) are formed in manners such that the data elements are free of identifiers which specifically identify the particular feedyards (1 or N) from which the data elements pertain. The pooled data (98) is provided to individual feedyards (1 and N). A feedyard manager or consultant is able to access the pooled data (98), thereby to be able to make better informed decisions related to operation of the feedyard and confinement–fed animals thereat.

FEEDYARD INFORMATION SYSTEM AND ASSOCIATED METHOD

The present invention relates generally to feedyards used for the commercial feeding of confinement-fed animals, such as cattle feedyards. More particularly, the present invention relates to an
5 information system, and an associated method, which provides data from which to facilitate judgments relating to the confinement-fed animals.

Pooled data from more than one feedyard is provided so that the feedyard management decisions can
10 be based upon regional data, not merely the data obtained at a single feedyard. Data elements of the pooled data are free of identifiers which identify the particular feedyard from which the data elements are derived. Privacy of information related to the
15 competitive position of an individual feedyard is thereby maintained.

A feedyard manager or consultant is able advantageously to make use of the pooled data to make better-informed judgments, for instance, to maximize
20 better the feed efficiency of the feedyard or to make judgments related to individual ones, or pens, of the confinement-fed animals. Operation of an embodiment of the feedyard information system is further able to display both locally-obtained data and the pooled data
25 to the feedyard manager or consultant. The display facilitates improved analysis by a feedyard manager or consultant of the operation of the feedyard and the confinement-fed animals located thereat.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Commercial feedyards provide facilities for the feeding of large numbers of confinement-fed animals, such as cattle. A significant number of feedyards are operated throughout the United States, and elsewhere. For instance, in the United States, about 1,500 feedyards presently operate. Many of such feedyards feed and process in excess of 5,000 animals per year. And, many of such feedyards are independently owned and operated. That is to say, individual ones of the feedyards many times form stand-alone, and independent, business entities.

Each of the feedyards typically utilizes one or more information systems to facilitate data collection at the feedyards.

Various information systems have been developed for feedyard operations. For instance, accounting, hospital, and feed-management systems have been developed and customized for feedyard operations. Such systems are intended to provide a feedyard manager or consultant with data to facilitate operation of the feedyard and to permit more-informed judgments to be made in feedyard operation decision making.

Different ones of the information systems have been developed by different entities, many times not permitting integration with one another. Some of the benefits provided by the use of computer-based information systems have been offset by the lack of integration between the different information systems of a single feedyard. The amounts of data which must be reviewed by a feedyard manager or consultant to facilitate the making of decisions to optimize the yard production, such as animal health and weight-gain is sometimes so significant, and provided to the manager

or consultant in an inconvenient form, so as to significantly reduce the benefits of such systems.

Also, because the feedyards are many times independently-owned and -operated, the feedyard manager or consultant has access only to data of the particular feedyard at which the manager or consultant is employed. Access to data related to feedyards located in a particular region would be helpful in the determination, for instance, of whether or not weather conditions are the cause of a feedyard condition. That is to say, a weather condition common to an entire region of feedyards might be likely to cause the same feedyard trends in individual ones of the feedyards of the entire region. A feedyard-specific trend, or a professional's practice-specific trend, in contrast, would be likely to be exhibited in only the particular feedyard.

Because of the independent ownership and operation of different feedyards, the separately-owned feedyards are oftentimes effectively in competition with one another. Data pertaining to the operation of a particular feedyard, if provided to another feedyard, together with the identity of the originating feedyard, might give others of the feedyards a competitive advantage over the originating feedyard. As a result, data which might otherwise collectively be of benefit to feedyards located in a selected region.

While systems have been developed by which to pool data and exchange data between feedyards have been developed, such existing manners do not provide appropriate safeguards to prevent the identification of the particular feedyard from which data is obtained.

A manner by which to pool data from more than one feedyard while providing such data in a manner free of identifiers which identify the particular feedyard from

which data elements of the pooled data are derived
would therefore be advantageous. Also, a feedyard
consultant might provide consulting services for more
5   than one feedyard. Because each feedyard might have
several information systems, and the various feedyards
might have different types of information systems, the
consultant shall need to know how to access a
potentially large number of information systems.

10   A manner by which better to facilitate display of
data provided by operation of information systems of a
feedyard would therefore also be advantageous.

It is in light of this background information
related to feedyards that the significant improvements
15 of the present invention have evolved.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention, accordingly, advantageously
provides a feedyard information system, and an
20 associated method, from which data can be provided to
facilitate feedyard management and consulting of a
feedyard which contains confinement-fed animals.

In one aspect of the present invention, data
associated with feedyards located within a selected
25 region is pooled together to form pooled data. Data
elements of the pooled data are free of identifiers
which identify the particular feedyard from which the
data elements are derived. Once formed, the pooled
data is provided to the feedyards. A feedyard manager,
30 consultant, or other appropriate party is able to make
use of the pooled data to make better-informed
judgments and decisions related to operation of the
feedyard. Because the pooled data is free of
identifiers which identify the particular feedyard from
35 which the data is derived, privacy of data pertaining
to a particular feedyard is maintained. Once received

5

at a feedyard, the pooled data is, for instance,
compared with locally-generated data to provide
indications of similarities, or disparities, of the

5   feedyard relative to feedyards throughout a selected
region. Responsive to analysis of the pooled data, or
comparisons between the local and pooled data, better-
informed judgments can be made regarding operation of
the feedyard and that of the confinement-fed animals

10   fed therein.

        In another aspect of the present invention, a
central computer is provided which receives, such as by
ASCII files attached to e-mail or other store-and-
forward signaling, data from individual feedyards.

15   Once the data is received, the central computer pools
together the data of various feedyards in a selected
region. Once pooled together, the data is returned,
also by way of an ASCII file attached to an e-mail
message or other store-and-forward signal, to the

20   feedyards. When pooled together, the data elements of
the pooled data are caused to be free of identifiers
which specifically identify from which of the feedyards
the data elements are derived.

        In another aspect of the present invention, a

25   feedyard computer is provided which receives feedyard
data related to the feedyard to which the feedyard
computer is associated. Such local data is supplied,
for instance, by way of networked connections with
other locally-positioned computer stations upon which

30   conventional accounting, health, food management, or
other software systems are operable. Such data, when
received at the feedyard computer is stored at a local
data based formed of portions of a memory device of the
feedyard computer. The feedyard computer is further

35   coupled to receive pooled data generated external to
the feedyard computer and provided thereto by way of an

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electronic connection. Once received, the pooled data
is stored at a regional database portion formed of a
memory device of the feedyard computer. Appropriate
5   algorithms executable at the feedyard computer place
the local feedyard data, as well as the pooled data, in
a form for display upon a computer user interface. A
feedyard manager, consultant, or other appropriate
party is thereby able to analyze the data and make
10   better-informed decisions responsive thereto.

In these and other aspects, therefore, a feedyard
information system, and an associated method for a
first feedyard and at least a second feedyard is
provided. A first plurality of confinement-fed animals
15   are located at the first feedyard, and at least a
second plurality of confinement-fed animals are located
at the at least the second feedyard. A first feedyard
computer is associated with the first feedyard. The
first feedyard computer is coupled to receive data
20   related to the first plurality of confinement-fed
animals. At least a second feedyard computer is
associated with the at least the second feedyard. The
second feedyard computer is coupled to receive data
related to the at least the second plurality of
25   confinement-fed animals. A central computer is coupled
to the first feedyard computer to receive, in
electronic form, signals indicative of the data related
to the first plurality of confinement-fed animals. The
central computer is also coupled to the at least the
30   second feedyard computer to receive, in electronic
form, signals indicative of the data related to the
second plurality of confinement-fed animals. The
central computer selectively pools the data, of which
the signals indicative thereof are received at the
35   central computer, thereby to form pooled data. Data
elements of the pooled data are free of identifiers

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specifically identifying from which of the first and the at least second feedyard computers the data elements are derived. The central computer provides
5   signals, in electronic form, indicative of the pooled data to the first and second feedyard computers.

The present invention and the scope thereof can be obtained from the accompanying drawings which are briefly summarized below, the following detailed
10   description of the presently-preferred embodiments of the invention, and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 illustrates the feedyard information
15   system of an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 illustrates a functional block diagram of a feedyard computer of an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 3 illustrates a functional block diagram of
20   a central computer operable to form pooled data according to an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4 illustrates a method flow diagram listing the method steps of the method of an embodiment of the present invention.
25

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring first to Figure 1, a feedyard information system, shown generally at 10, of an embodiment of the present invention, is installed in a
30   geographical area encompassing a plurality of feedyards of which two feedyards 1 and N are illustrated in the Figure. As described above, each of the feedyards is operable to feed large numbers of confinement-fed animals. In conventional manner, the confinement-fed
35   animals are maintained, for instance, in a plurality of pens, each pen containing a certain number of the

confinement-fed animals. Also in conventional manner,
the confinement-fed animals can be owned by the
feedyard or ownership may be retained by another party
5   which contracts with the feedyard to feed the animals
in which the retained ownership is maintained.

In the exemplary illustration of the Figure, each
of the feedyards, feedyard 1 and feedyard N, are
independently operated. That is to say, feedyard 1 and
10   feedyard N are separately owned and are operated
independent of one another. Because of such separate
ownership, the feedyards might well be in a competitive
position with respect to one another.

Operation of the first feedyard is facilitated
15   through the use of information gathering and processing
systems. Here, the separate information systems are
resident upon various computer stations located at the
first feedyard. A health information computer 12
includes algorithms executable thereat to receive and
20   to process health information data related to the
confinement-fed animals of the first feedyard. A feed
information computer 14 includes algorithms executable
thereat to receive and to process feed information data
related to the feeding of the confinement-fed animals
25   of the first feedyard. And, a feedyard operation
computer 16 includes algorithms executable thereat to
receive and to process feedyard operation data related
to the operation of the first feedyard.

The computers 12, 14, and 16 are here shown to be
30   connected together in a networked connection, here to a
computer server 18. Data input and processed at any of
the computers 12, 14 and 16 can be communicated by way
of the networked connections with the computer server
18.

35   A feedyard computer 22, forming a portion of the
feedyard information system 10 of an embodiment of the

present invention, is also coupled in the networked connection with the computer server 18. Thereby, the feedyard computer 22 is coupled to receive health

5   information data input to, and processed by, the health information computer 12, feed information data input to and processed by the feed information computer 14, and feedyard operation data input to and processed by the feedyard operation computer 16. Other data is

10 analogously accessible by the feedyard computer 22.

In another arrangement in which the computers 12, 14, 16, and 22 are not coupled in a networked connection, the data of the computers 12, 14, and 16 is provided to the computer 22, e.g., by physically

15 transporting portable storage media containing the data to the computer 22.

In the exemplary embodiment, the algorithms executable at the computers 12, 14 and 16, comprise independent software systems. That is to say, the

20 algorithms executable at the separate computers 12, 14, and 16 need not be integrated with one another. In operation of an embodiment of the present invention, the algorithms executable at the computers 12, 14, and 16, need only be capable of generating ASCII files to

25 be provided to the feedyard computer 22. And, while the exemplary embodiment illustrates the feedyard computer 22 to be connected in the networked connection with the other computers 12, 14 and 16, the ASCII data may alternately be provided to the feedyard computer in

30 other manners, for instance, by providing the ASCII data to the feedyard computer on a portable storage device, such as a floppy disk, or the like.

Feedyard N also includes a feedyard computer, here referenced by 26. The feedyard computer 26 is also

35 coupled to receive ASCII data related to, *inter alia*, health information, feed information, and feedyard

operation data associated with the feedyard N. The
feedyard computer 26 is analogous to the feedyard
computer 22, coupled by way of a networked connection,
5   to receive such data. Here, the elements together
connected in the networked connection are represented
by a single block, i.e., the local network 28. Again,
the ASCII data can be provided to the feedyard computer
26 in other manners, as appropriate.

10   The feedyard computers, here the feedyard
computers 22 and 26, of the feedyards are coupled to a
central computer 32 by way of a communication server
33. An uplink transmission path 34 and a downlink
transmission path 36 are shown to connect the feedyard
15   computer 22 with the communication server 33. In turn,
the communication server 33 is coupled to the central
computer 32 by way of the lines 37 and 38.
Analogously, an uplink transmission path 40 and a
downlink transmission path 42 analogously couple the
20   feedyard computer 26 with the central computer 32.
While not separately illustrated, feedyard computers of
other feedyards may analogously be coupled to the
central computer 32, in like fashion.

        The uplink transmission paths 34 and 40 permit the
25   transmission of data related to the feedyards to which
the feedyard computers 22 and 26 are associated to be
uploaded to the central computer 32. The central
computer is operable to pool the data provided thereto.
When the data is pooled together to form the pooled
30   data, identifiers identifying specifically from which
feedyard the data pertains or is otherwise derived, is
removed. Thereby, the pooled data becomes free of
identifiers which identify the particular feedyard from
which the data pertains. Because the pooled data
35   includes data from, or related to, more than one
feedyard, use of such data can be advantageously

utilized by an operator or consultant of an individual one of the feedyards.

The pooled data formed by the central computer 32 is transmitted upon the downlink transmission paths 36 and 40 to download the pooled data to the feedyard computers 22 and 26. The pooled data is advantageously utilized by a feedyard manager or consultant. Comparisons, for instance, can be formed between data specific to the feedyard over which the management or consultant decision is to be made against the pooled data. The results of such comparisons, for instance, provide indications to the feedyard manager or consultant as to whether a problem identified in the locally-obtained data is feedyard-specific, or generic to more than one feedyard.

Because the data elements of the pooled data do not include identifiers specifically identifying from which feedyards the data elements pertain, information confidential to a particular feedyard, identifying such feedyard is not provided to any other feedyard. However, the advantageous use of the pooled data is still permitted at the various feedyards. Better-informed judgments related to feedyard operation and the health of the confinement-fed animals located thereat is permitted.

Figure 1 further illustrates a remotely-positioned computer 46. The computer 46 is also coupled to the central computer 32, here by way of uplink and downlink transmission paths 48 and 52, respectively. Pooled data formed at the central computer 32 is also downloadable to the remote computer 46 by way of the downlink transmission path 52. And, here, the remote computer 46 is also coupled by way of a separate connection 54, with the feedyard computer 22. The connection 54 may be formed, for instance, by a modem

connection with a wireline telephonic network. Data
specific to the first feedyard and provided to the
feedyard computer 22 is accessible at the remote
5   computer 46 by way of such connection 54.

     Because the remote computer 46 is coupled to
receive both the pooled data and data specific to the
first feedyard, a feedyard manager or consultant,
located remote from the first feedyard, is able to
10   access data to enable the manager or consultant to make
better-informed judgments pertaining to the feedyard
and the confinement-fed animals located thereat. In
analogous fashion, a connection can also be effectuated
with the feedyard computer 26. Access to the data
15   stored at the computers 22 and 26 is controlled at the
respective feedyards. Only authorized parties are able
to access the feedyard computers 22 and 26, thereby
ensuring the confidentiality of the data related to the
respective feedyards. In one implementation, the
20   feedyard-specific data of the respective feedyards is
uploaded to the central computer 32 by way of the
appropriate uplink transmission path 34 or 38 utilizing
a store-and-forward technique, such as an e-mail
transmission in which ASCII files containing the data
25   are appended to the transmission. Pooled data is
analogously downloaded by way of the downlink
transmission paths 36, 42, and 52. The connections
provided by way of the transmission path 54, in one
implementation, similarly is effectuated.

30   Figure 1 also illustrates an additional remotely-
positioned computer 46'. The computer 46' is operable
in analogous manner with the computer 46 and is here
representative of a remote computer used by another
feedyard manager or consultant, i.e., separate from the
35   feedyard manager or consultant who uses the computer
46. The same data is provided by way of the line 52

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both the computers 46 and 46'. But, the remote
computer 46' is here shown to be coupled to the
feedyard computer 26, rather than the computer 22, by
5   way of the line 54'.
     Lines 56 and 58 are further shown in the Figure.
These lines represent access permitted, e.g., by
request upon the line 56, and delivery upon the line
58, to selected data provided to the server 33 from
10   one, or more, of the feedyard computers. For example,
the owner of confinement-fed animals located at
selected pens of the feedyard 1 is provided with e-mail
transmission of information related to the animals.
Information can similarly be provided to animal
15   nutritionists or veterinarians in the same manner.
Security is assured as access is provided only to the
server 33 to request, and to be provided, with data
uploaded to the server 33 from the individual
feedyards.
20   Figure 2 illustrates the feedyard computer 22 of
an embodiment of the present invention and which forms
a portion of the feedyard information system 10, shown
in Figure 1. The feedyard computer 26 may analogously
be represented. The computer 22 is here shown to
25   include a computer platform 62 containing a processor
capable of executing algorithms thereat. The platform
62 is coupled to a feedyard computer memory 64,
representative here of any conventional storage device
accessible by the computer platform 62.
30   Algorithms forming an information manager 66 and
algorithms forming a solution screen algorithm 68 are
stored at the memory device 64 and retrievable by the
computer platform 62 to be executed, as appropriate,
during operation of the feedyard computer. Portions of
35   the memory 64 are allocated to form a regional database
portion 70 and a local database portion 72. Data

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stored at the database portion 70 and 72 are accessed
and used by the information manager during operation of
the feedyard computer. The information manager 66 is
5   operable, when executed by the processor of the
computer platform 62, to store pooled data received at
the feedyard computer in the regional database portion
68 and to store local data provided to the feedyard
computer in the local database portion 72. Thereafter,
10   when data is to be utilized during operation of the
feedyard computer, the information manager 66 is
operable to retrieve the appropriate data elements.

The computer 22 is further shown to include a user
interface, here a video display device and a user
15   actuation keypad. The solution screen algorithm 68 is
operable, when executed, to operate upon selected data
elements of the data stored at the database portions 70
and 72 into a form for display upon the video display
device of the interface 74. Various portions of the
20   solution screen algorithm 68 are executable responsive
to, for instance, user inputs entered by way of the
actuation keypad of the user interface 74. Both local
data and regional data stored in the local and regional
database portion 70 and 72 are accessible for display
25   at the user interface 74. Thereby, a feedyard manager
or consultant is better able to make informed judgments
regarding operation of the feedyard and the
confinement-fed animals thereat.

Figure 3 illustrates the central computer 32 of an
30   embodiment of the present invention and which forms a
portion of the feedyard information system 10, shown in
Figure 1. The computer 32 also includes a computer
platform, here computer platform 82 having a processor
forming a portion thereof. The computer 32 includes a
35   memory 84 at which a data pooling algorithm 86 is
resident. The algorithm 86 is retrievable by the

computer platform 82 to be executed thereat. The data
pooling algorithm is operable to pool the data received
at the central computer 32 to form the pooled data
5   therefrom. The pooled data, once formed, is storable
at the central computer 32 to be retrieved and
downloaded to the computers 22, 26, and 46, as
appropriate, during operation of the feedyard
information system 10 shown in Figure 1.
10   Figure 4 illustrates a method flow diagram of the
method, shown generally at 92, of an embodiment of the
present invention. The method provides display data to
an operator of a first feedyard.
         First, and as indicated by the block 94, data
15   stored at a first feedyard computer, and related to a
first plurality of the confinement-fed animals, is
communicated in electronic form to a central computer.
Then, and as indicated by the block 96, data stored in
at least a second feedyard computer and related to at
20   least a second plurality of confinement-fed animals is
communicated in electronic form to the central
computer.
         Thereafter, and as indicated by the block 98, the
data communicated to the central computer is pooled to
25   form pooled data. The pooled data includes data
elements representative of both the first and second
plurality of confinement-fed animals. The data
elements of the pooled data are also free of
identifiers, specifically identifying from which of the
30   feedyards the data elements are derived.
         Then, and as indicated by the block 102, at least
selected data elements of the pooled data are
communicated in electronic form to the first feedyard
computer. And, as indicated by the block 104, the at
35   least selected data elements are provided in human
perceptible form to an operator of the first feedyard.

From such data, the feedyard operator is better able to make judgments and decisions related to operation of the feedyard.

5   Advantageous use of the pooled data permits better operation of the feedyards. Because pooled data provided to the feedyards is free of identifiers which specifically identify the feedyard from which the data elements of the pooled data pertain, the privacy of 10 individual ones of the feedyards is maintained.

The previous descriptions are of preferred examples for implementing the invention, and the scope of the invention should not necessarily be limited by this description. The scope of the present invention 15 is defined by the following claims.

CLAIMS:

1. A feedyard information system for a first
feedyard at which a first plurality of confinement-fed
animals are located and at least a second feedyard at
which at least a second plurality of confinement-fed
5   animals are located, said feedyard information system
comprising:

a first feedyard computer associated with the
first feedyard, said first feedyard computer coupled to
receive data related to the first plurality of
10 confinement-fed animals;

at least a second feedyard computer
associated with the at least the second feedyard, said
second feedyard computer coupled to receive data
related to the second plurality of confinement-fed
15 animals;

a central computer coupled to said first
feedyard computer to receive, in electronic form,
signals indicative of the data related to the first
plurality of confinement-fed animals and to said at
20 least the second feedyard computer to receive, in
electronic form, signals indicative of the data related
to the second plurality of confinement-fed animals,
said central computer for selectively pooling the data,
of which the signals indicative thereof are received at
25 said central computer to form pooled data, data
elements of the pooled data free of identifiers
specifically identifying from which of said first and
at least second feedyard computers, respectively, the
data elements are derived, and for providing signals,
30 in electronic form, indicative of the pooled data to
said first and second feedyard computers.

2. The feedyard information system of claim 1
wherein said first feedyard computer comprises a first
5 memory for storing, in a first local database portion
thereof, the data related to the first plurality of
confinement-fed animals, and for storing, in a first
regional database portion thereof, the pooled data, the
signals indicative of which are provided to said first
10 feedyard computer by said central computer.

3. The feedyard information system of claim 2
wherein said first feedyard computer comprises a
processor and a first feedyard computer information
manager algorithm executable thereat, said first
5 feedyard computer information manager for managing the
data stored at said first local database portion of
said first memory and said first regional database
portion of said first memory.

4. The feedyard information system of claim 3
wherein said first feedyard computer further comprises
a first user interface and a first feedyard computer
solutions screen algorithm executable at the processor
5 of said first feedyard computer, said first feedyard
computer solutions screen algorithm, when executed, for
generating a selected display, in human perceptible
form, at said first user interface, of at least a
selected data element stored at said first memory.

5. The feedyard information system of claim 4
wherein the selected display comprises a comparison of
at least one data element of data stored in said first
local database and at least one data element of data
5 stored in said first regional database.

6. The feedyard information system of claim 1
wherein the data to which said first feedyard computer

is coupled to receive comprises feed information

5 related to the first plurality of confinement fed

animals.

7. The feedyard information system of claim 1
wherein the data to which said first feedyard computer
is coupled to receive comprises health information
related to the first plurality of confinement-fed

5 animals.

8. A method for providing display data to an
operator at a first feedyard, said method comprising
the steps of:

communicating in electronic form data stored

5 at a first feedyard computer related to a first
plurality of confinement-fed animals located at the
first feedyard to a central computer;

communicating in electronic form data, stored
in at least a second feedyard computer related to at

10 least a second plurality of confinement-fed animals
located at least at a second feedyard to the central
computer;

pooling the data, communicated during said
first and second steps, respectively, of communicating,

15 at the central computer to form pooled data having data
elements representative of both the first plurality of
the confinement-fed animals and the at least the second
plurality of the confinement-fed animals, the data
elements of the pooled data free of identifiers

20 specifically identifying from which of the first and at
least second feedyards, respectively, the data elements
are derived;

20

25   communicating in electronic form at least
selected data elements of the pooled data, pooled
during said step of pooling, t the first feedyard
computer; and

            providing the at least selected data elements
30   in human perceptible form to the operator at the first
feedyard.

      9.   The method of claim 8 wherein the data related
to the first plurality of confinement-fed animals and
the data related to the second plurality of
confinement-fed animals communicated during said first
5   and second steps of communicating, respectively,
comprise animal feed data.

      10.   The method of claim 9 wherein the data
related to the first plurality of confinement-fed
animals and the data related to the second plurality of
confinement-fed animals communicated during said first
5   and second steps of communicating, respectively,
comprise animal health data.

      11.   The method of claim 8 wherein the data
communicated during said first and second steps of
communicating is communicated pursuant to a store-and-
forward technique.

      12.   The method of claim 8 wherein the pooled data
formed during said step of pooling comprises data
averages of selected data elements related to both the
first feedyard and the at least the second feedyard.

      13.   The method of claim 8 wherein the pooled data
communicated during said step of communicating the
pooled data is communicated pursuant to a store-and-
forward technique.

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14. The method of claim 8 wherein said step of providing the selected data elements in human perceptible form comprises displaying the selected data elements upon a display device.

15. In a feedyard information system for a first feedyard in which a first plurality of confinement-fed animals are located and at least a second feedyard at which at least a second plurality of confinement-fed animals are located, an improvement of a feedyard computer associated with the first feedyard, said feedyard computer comprising:

a memory for storing in a regional database portion thereof, externally-generated polling data, the externally-generated polling data having data elements representative of both the first plurality of confinement-fed animals and the at least the second plurality of confinement-fed animals; and

a solutions-screen generator for generating a selected display in human perceptible form of selected polling data elements of the externally-generated polling data stored at said memory.

16. The feedyard computer of claim 15 wherein said memory further comprises a local database portion for storing data related to the first plurality of confinement-fed animals therein and wherein the selected display generated by said solutions-screen generator further comprises selected data elements of the data related to the first plurality of confinement-fed animals of the first feedyard.

17. In a feedyard information system for a first feedyard in which a first plurality of confinement-fed animals are located and at least a second feedyard at

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5   which at least a second plurality of confinement-
fed animals are located, an improvement of a central
computer for generating polling data, said central
computer comprising:

       a memory device coupled to receive first-
10   feedyard data associated with the first plurality of
confinement-fed animals of the first feedyard and to
receive at least second-feedyard data associated with
the at least second feedyard, said memory device for
storing the first-feedyard data and the at least second
15   feedyard data received thereat;

       a data pooler coupled to said memory device,
said data pooler for pooling together the data stored
at said memory device to form pooled data therefrom,
the pooled data having data elements representative of
20   both the first plurality of confinement-fed animals,
the pooled data free of identifiers specifically
identifying from which of the first and at least second
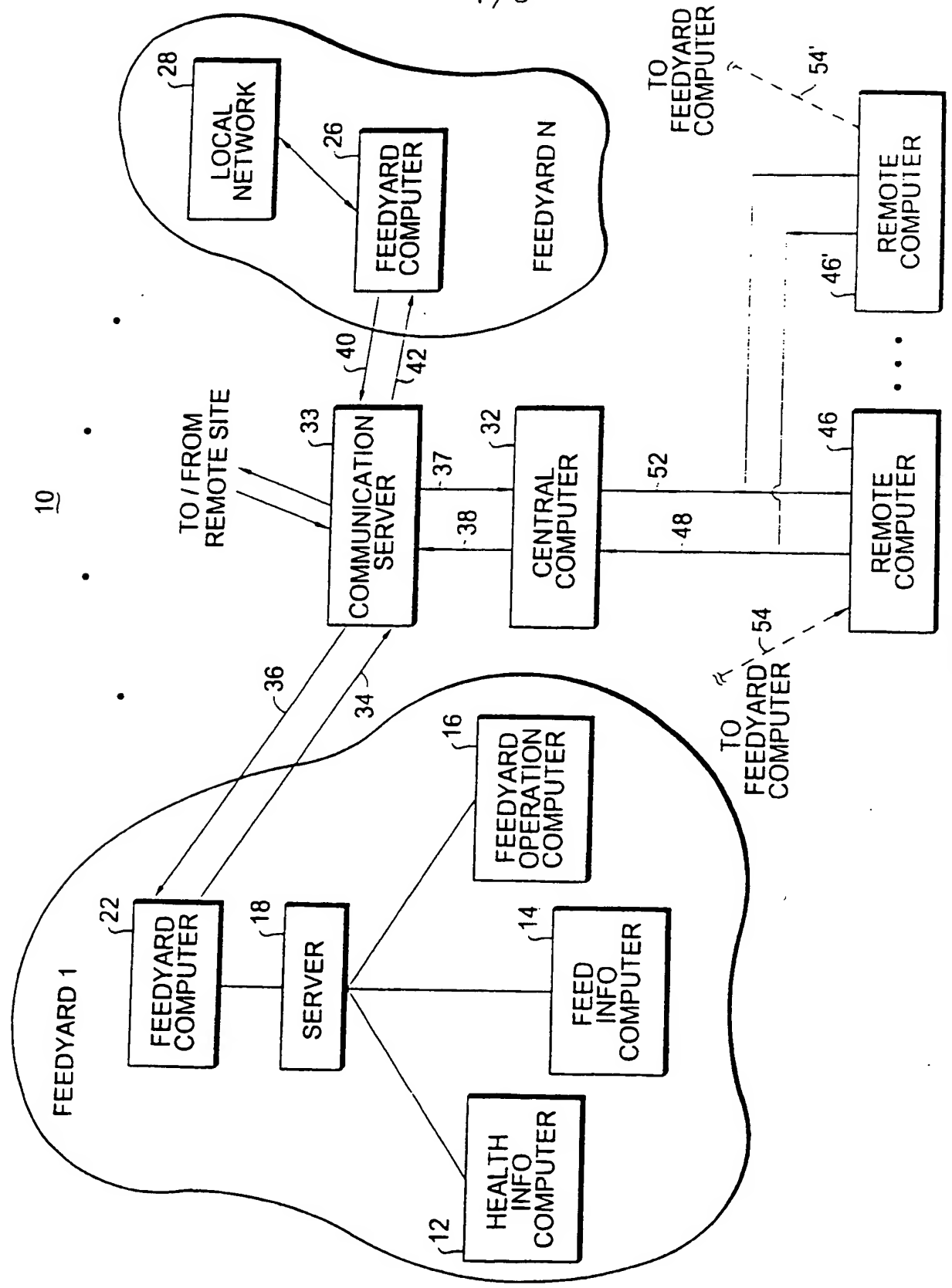feedyards, respectively, data elements of the pooled
data are derived.

FIG. 1

FIG. 2
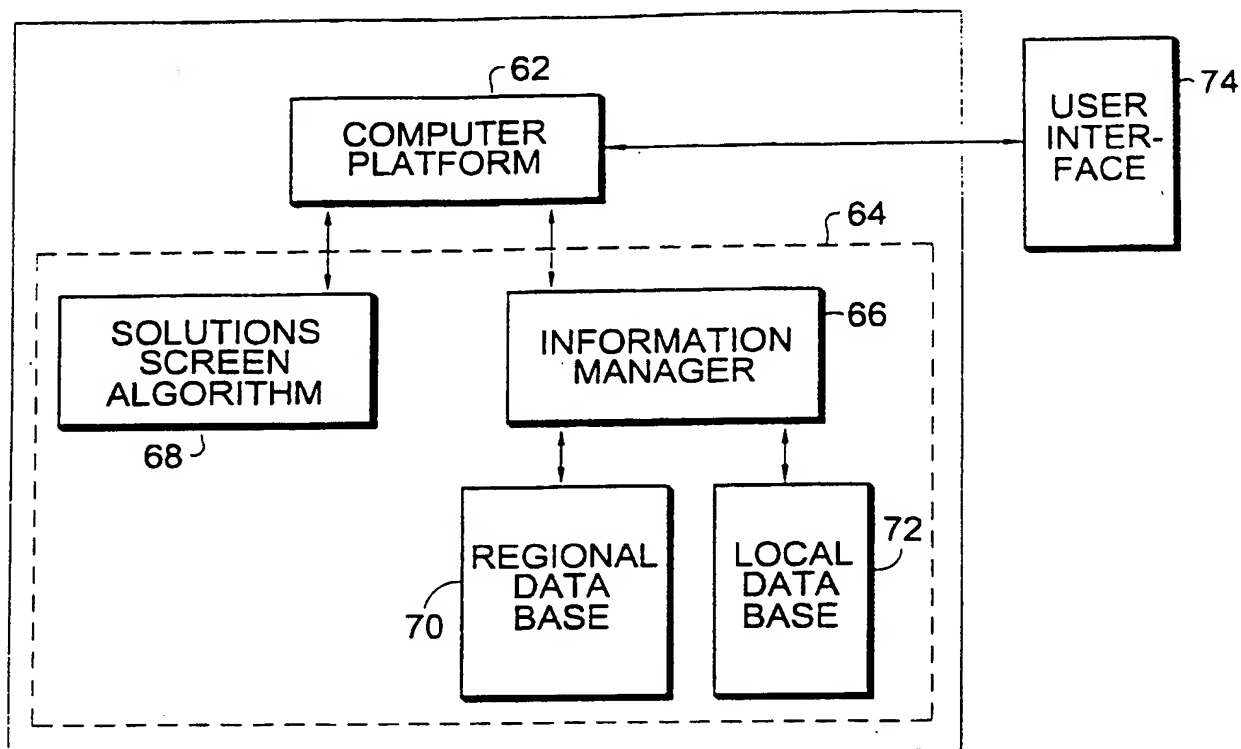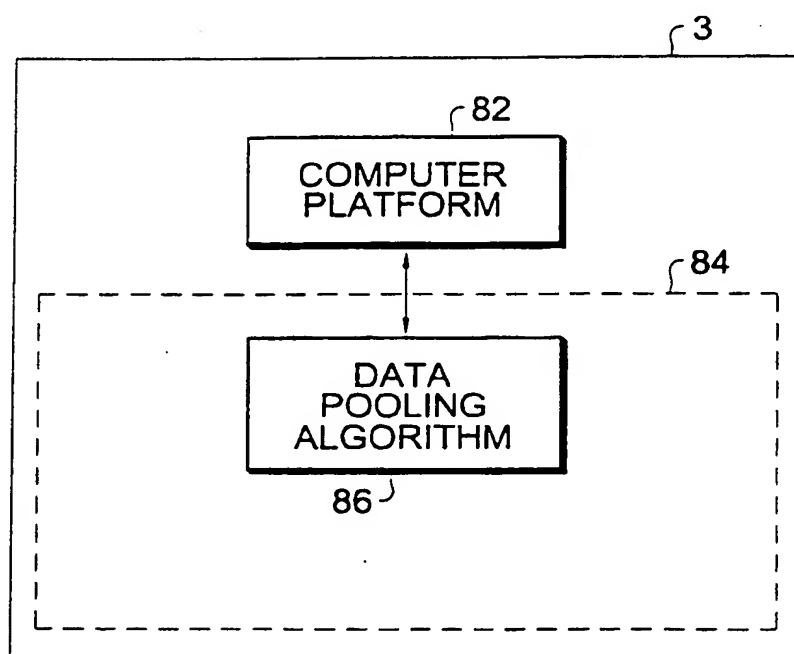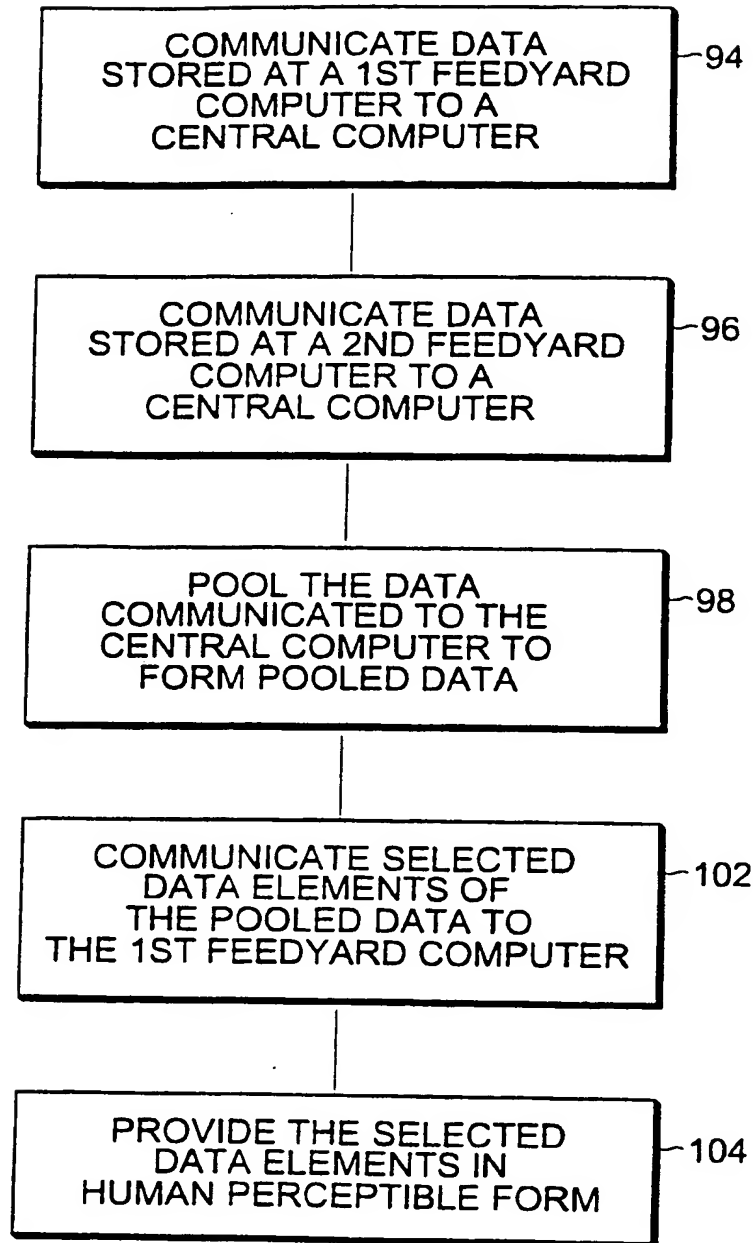

FIG. 3

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FIG. 4

A.   CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6)   :A01K 1/03
US CL   :119/421, 51.01, 51.02, 57.92

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B.   FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 119/421, 51.01, 51.02, 57.92

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C.   DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	MADAY, J. How Data Becomes Information Networking and Pooled Feedyard Data Streamlines Decision-Making Process. Dovers. 1998, pps 50 and 52	1-17
A, P	US 5,803,906 A (PRATT et al) 08 September 1998 (8.09.98)	
A	US 5,315,505 A (PRATT et al) 24 May 1994 (24.05.94)	
A	US 5,673,647 A (PRATT) 07 October 1997 (07.10.97)	
A, P	US 5,867,820 A (CURETON et al) 02 February 1999 (02.02.99), see abstract.	1-17

[X]   Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.   [ ]   See patent family annex.

	Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance		
"E"	earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	"&"	document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
21 SEPTEMBER 1999	05 NOV 1999
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230	Authorized officer JUDITH A. NELSON Telephone No. (703) 306-4177

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet)(July 1992)*

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,457,627 A (CURETON et al) 10 October 1995 (10.10.95)	1-17